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TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 23, 2009

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 930, An Act Concerning the Cigarette Tax, the Tobacco Products Tax and the Alcoholic Beverages Tax.

This bill raises the tax on cigarettes by 50 cents per pack. It also raises taxes on other forms of tobacco such as smokeless tobacco and small cigars.

I strongly support raising the cigarette tax but only if a substantial portion of the funds are specifically and unequivocally directed to smoking cessation and prevention programs. The cigarette tax is a revenue enhancement but must be coupled with an effective program to enable smokers to quit.

On smoking cessation assistance, Connecticut's record is abysmal.

In 2007, the state's Quitline offered a smoking cessation program expanded to consist of nicotine replacement therapy and counseling services. Significant demand quickly depleted its limited financial resources and the replacement therapy was terminated. Last December, my office settled a lawsuit against a pharmaceutical manufacturer, directing almost \$4 million into the Connecticut Cancer Plan Initiative. I strongly recommended that the funds be used to restart the Quitline's smoking cessation service.

Nothing has been done.

The vast majority of states provide Medicaid coverage for smoking cessation programs. In 2004, the General Assembly directed the Administration to develop a plan to provide coverage for tobacco cessation programs.

The plan was developed but nothing has been implemented. Connecticut remains one of only 7 states that do not provide Medicaid coverage for smoking cessation -- despite the disproportionate numbers of smokers who receive Medicaid assistance.

This record of inaction is reprehensible.

Each year, Connecticut has received more than \$100 million from the tobacco litigation settlement -- more than \$1 billion since I signed that agreement in 1998. Only a fraction -- an unacceptable pittance -- has been used to fight tobacco and nicotine addiction.

We have missed -- tragically -- an opportunity to save lives and do more. The costs of inaction and avoidance will be billions of dollars -- many multiples of the amounts we should have devoted to this fight.

Again this year we have failed to fund the Quitline nicotine replacement therapy/counseling services or provide Medicaid coverage for cessation.

I urge the committee's favorable consideration of Senate Bill 930 only if substantial funding is committed -- without qualification -- to the Quitline and Medicaid coverage for smoking cessation programs.